

# HISTORY

—OF—

## ST. JOHN'S CHURCH,

PHILADELPHIA.

—BY—

MARTIN I. J. GRIFFIN.

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
OPENING OF THE CHURCH—APRIL 16TH, 1882.

PHILADELPHIA :

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1882.

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*synæticus  
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—TO THE—

CATHOLIC PHILOPATRIAN LITERARY INSTITUTE.

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REVERE THE CHURCH THY MOTHER AND  
LOVE THY FATHERLAND.

P.

*M. J. J. Cariffin*  
16 F '02



# ST. JOHN'S CHURCH.

## + — ITS HISTORY — +

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In consequence of the continued difficulty between the Trustees of St. Mary's Church and Rt. Rev. Henry Conwell, D. D., Bishop of Philadelphia, and Rt. Rev. Francis Patrick Kenrick, Coadjutor, Rev. John Hughes, then pastor of St. Joseph's Church, formed the designed of erecting a church whose affairs should be conducted without Trustees. On the Festival of St. John, 1830, he received permission from Bishop Kenrick to undertake the erection of the desired church.

He, accordingly, announced to his congregation his purpose, and solicited donations towards the work. On Monday he waited at home to receive subscriptions; but he waited in vain. On Tuesday he was likewise disappointed; he began to feel discouraged. On Wednesday a servant-woman called upon him. "This is the first day, Father," said she, "since you spoke to us on Sunday that I have been able to come out. I have brought my contribution for the new church." The sum was three levies. "I took the money," said Father Hughes, "ran to my bed-room, and, throwing myself upon my knees, thanked God that the work was done. From that moment I never had a doubt of the success of my enterprise." Five thousand dollars were contributed by one individual, while Mr. M. A. Frenaye, so well known in connection with the church until his death, about ten years ago, contributed most munificently, and rendered valuable services towards the erection of the church.

In February, 1831, Father Hughes purchased the ground on which the church stands. It is 97 feet wide by 156 feet long, and cost about \$13,000.

On Friday afternoon, May 6th, 1831, the corner-stone was

laid by Bishop Kenrick, assisted by Rev. John Hughes and Rev. T. J. Donahue, of St. Joseph's; Rev. William and Rev. Nicholas O'Donnell and Rev. Michael Hurley, of St. Augustine's; Rev. Jeremiah Keilley, of St. Mary's, and Rev. M. Carroll, of Wilmington, Del.

Father Hughes, in writing to the present Archbishop Purcell, of Cincinnati, Ohio, in September, 1831, says of the church: "It will cause those who give nothing towards its erection to 'murmur' at its costliness and those who did contribute to be proud of their own doing. As a religious edifice, it will be the pride of the city. The leading Protestants and infidels proclaim it the only building that is entitled to be called a church, 'inasmuch as its appearance indicates its use, and there is no danger of mistaking it for a work-shop.'"

He wrote to his sister, Sister Angela: "The new church bids fair to be the handsomest in the United States. In point of grandeur, it is not, of course, to be compared with the Cathedral of Baltimore, but as far as beauty is concerned, it will exceed it."

Joseph Bonaparte presented to the sanctuary a "Flagellation of Christ," by Hannibal Caracci, said to be valued in London at one thousand guineas. Signor Monachesi, whose paintings decorate many of our churches, ornamented the sanctuary as a voluntary offering. The other portions of the edifice were decorated by the same artist, whose only compensation was a voluntary contribution of the congregation in December, 1832.

On Passion Sunday, April 8th, 1832, the new church was opened for divine service, and dedicated by Bishops Conwell and Kenrick. A sermon on the "Marks of a True Church" was delivered by Rev. Dr. Power, of New York. The collection amounted to eight hundred and fifty dollars. Father Hughes thought the sermon injudicious, as many Protestants were present at his invitation. "The sermon caused some irritation and provoked controversy," and was a remote cause of the discussion between Father Hughes and Rev. John Breckinridge.

The Fourth of July, 1832, was celebrated in St. John's Church

by the citizens. A platform was erected in front of the altar. "The oration was foolish, and pronounced so by all that heard it." Father Hughes said he took no pleasure in granting the use of the church for the purpose, but "the selection of St. John's was intended as a compliment to the Catholics and to the church." During that month Father Hughes had more converts than for a year previous. At the celebration the prayer was recited by Father Hughes.

At this church on Tuesday evening, April 29th, 1833, Mozart's Requiem Mass was performed for the first time in this country. This master-piece of Mozart's was the last work of that celebrated composer, and was written under the idea that he was about to die and that he was writing a Requiem for his own funeral. He was dead at the time of its first performance.

The exterior of the church had not yet been completely finished; so in October, 1833, an organization of a number of the congregation took place. They formed a society for the exterior finishing of the church so as to procure means for its completion, in order that it might be made to correspond with the interior decorations. This society had a President, three Vice-Presidents, two Secretaries, a Treasurer and twenty members of Financial Committee. After the dissolution of the society, after having accomplished the object of the formation, the names of the members, alphabetically arranged, and of those who had been officers, were engrossed on parchment and deposited in the archives of the church. It cannot now be found.

For some time after the erection of the church, Father Hughes was alone in the pastoral charge. He first believed that Rev. T. J. Donahue, his assistant at St. Joseph's, would be sent to aid him, but Bishop Kenrick desired Father Donahue to undertake the erection of St. Michael's. Father Hughes wrote to Rev. Edw. Purcell, brother of the Archbishop of Cincinnati, "What would you think of coming to join me?" In this letter the pastor described the qualities he desired his assistant to possess—"a man of sound but not enthusiastic piety; mild in his temper;

honest, open and sincere in his disposition ; one who is capable of writing and pronouncing well his sermon, and does not think himself privileged to 'talk' nonsense in the name of the Lord." In this sentence he portrayed the character of Rev. F. X. Gartland who was sent to assist him in 1832. Father Gartland was frequently left in pastoral charge, as Father Hughes several times accompanied Bishop Kenrick on his episcopal visitations. In 1834 Father Hughes preached a sermon in behalf of the Polish Exiles, who were obliged to leave their native land after the suppression of the Polish Revolution. Two hundred and three dollars were contributed.

Father Hughes and his assistant labored energetically to liquidate the debts of the church, which was not yet wholly completed. Many of the creditors were urgent in their demands, while all appeals for money with which to pay this indebtedness were but feebly responded to. Father Hughes, as a last resort, determined to visit Mexico in order to collect the means necessary to satisfy the creditors. For this purpose he studied Spanish for six months, determined to go without the knowledge of his congregation. Preparations were accordingly made to start ; during the celebration of Mass one Sunday, a carriage awaited Father Hughes. But Father Gartland could not restrain his concern at the near departure of the pastor. Accordingly, he informed the congregation of what was Father Hughes' intention, and he appealed to the people for whom he labored not to allow their beloved pastor to undertake such a journey. Mr. George Edwards arose and offered \$1,000, twelve others gave \$500 ; and throughout the church there arose responses proving the generosity of the people and their love for Father Hughes. About \$4,000 were thus subscribed. After Mass a meeting was held in the pastoral residence. Among those present were Dr. Jos. Nancrede, Charles A. Repplier, Michael McGrath, George Edwards, Francis Tiernan, R. F. Walsh and Mr. Blaim. Mr Repplier was chosen Treasurer ; all agreed to secure the payment of about fifteen thousand dollars of the debt then pressing, and so pledged their faith to Father



Hughes. The appeal of Father Gartland and this action of the influential members of the congregation had the desired effect, and the most urgent demands were paid.

Father Hughes continued to labor energetically for the dissemination of the faith and the interests of his people. In the years 1834-35, he was engaged in a now celebrated controversy and discussion with Rev. John Breckinridge. The Propaganda in the beginning of 1836 decreed the division of the diocese, the transfer of Bishop Kenrick to Pittsburg, and the appointment of Rev. John Hughes as Coadjutor to Bishop Conwell. The division not being sanctioned by the Pope, the elevation to the Episcopacy of the founder of St. John's was reserved for a short time, and to a See where his services were more necessary.

The cost of the ground and the erection of St. John's Church was about \$73,000. At the time of the appointment of Father Hughes as Coadjutor to Bishop Dubois, of New York, in November, 1837, the indebtedness on the church was \$40,000. On Sunday, November 26th, he announced to his congregation the honor that had been conferred upon him, and likewise upon them, by his elevation to the responsibilities of a Bishop. His ordination took place at New York, January 7th, 1838. In a few weeks he returned to this city, and celebrated his first Pontifical Mass at St. John's. On Sunday, January 27th, 1838, he preached a sermon for the benefit of the Ladies' Benevolent Society attached to the church. His text was "The poor ye have always with you." Over four hundred dollars were collected.

During this year Bishop Kenrick made St. John's his cathedral.

On the transfer of Father Hughes to New York, Rev. F. X. Gartland became pastor.

Previous to 1839, the church had been lighted by chandeliers, but in the beginning of that year, it was resolved to introduce gas. Bishop Hughes, learning of this determination, wrote to Mr. Frenaye, "You will ruin the church and be sorry for it when too late. Leave gas to the theatres, fancy stores and toy shops, but

do not desecrate the church with the association which it will present to the eye. If not for my sake, I would beg for God's sake that you will not do this." He offered to give \$100 to defray an expense that had been incurred. Now the new electric light is within a few feet of the church, and will, no doubt, in a short time supersede the gas that so displeased Bishop Hughes.

On March 2d, 1840, a meeting of the friends of the St. Charles' Seminary was held at this church for the purpose of organizing, on a more efficient plan than had heretofore been in operation, the various auxiliary societies of St. Charles' Seminary that existed in the city. John Keating, Esq., presided; Judge Randall and Louis Laforgue acted as secretaries. Addresses were delivered by Rev. Dr. Moriarty and Rev. Dr. O'Connor, President of the Seminary, who presented a plan for the establishment of these societies.

On St. Patrick's Day, 1840, a collection was taken up in the church to aid in opening a store in front of St. John's Orphan Asylum for the benefit of that institution, which was then situated in Chestnut Street below Thirteenth. At this time the Assistant to Father Gartland was Rev. Edward J. Sourin.

In June, 1840, Bishop Kenrick issued a Pastoral Letter recommending the temperance pledge to his people. On the 28th of that month he delivered a sermon at this church on the subject, when the pastors and three hundred and twenty of the congregation received certificates of membership. A greater number would have done so at that time but for the want of certificates. Within a month over twelve hundred of the congregation had taken the pledge. The society then organized ceased to exist in 1877. Mr. Edward McGovern being its last President, and the late Bernard Rafferty the last Secretary, and Francis Cooper the last Treasurer. At present St. John's is one of the few parishes without a total abstinence society. The 28th of June next would be an appropriate time to organize one.

On July 28th, 1840, Bishop Hughes again visited the scenes of his labors as a parish priest and the church he had founded. He had lately returned from a voyage to Europe. On the above

date he delivered a sermon to his former parishioners. On the 28th of October a charity sermon, for the benefit of St. John's Asylum, was delivered by Very Rev. Dr. Power, of New York. Bishop Hughes was expected to speak, but was detained owing to the school controversy in New York. He sent Dr. Power as a "substitute," saying it was the first time he had ever disappointed an engagement."

On November 21st, 1841, the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, Very Rev. Peter Paul Lefevre, Administrator of Diocese of Detroit, was consecrated Bishop of that See. The ceremony was performed at St. John's by Bishop Kenrick, assisted by Bishop England, of Charleston, and Bishop Hughes, of New York. Pontifical Mass was celebrated by Bishop Kenrick; Archpriest, Very Rev. Edward Barron, V. G.; Deacon, Rev. F. X. Gartland; Subdeacon, Rev. C. J. Carter; Master of Ceremonies, Rev. M. Maller, C. M., President of the Theological Seminary. The sermon was delivered by Bishop Hughes.

During the riots of May, 1844, General Patterson placed Major Dithmar with a guard for the defense of the church. No attempt was made, however, to destroy or damage this the cathedral church. In 1845 this congregation contributed \$300 for the relief of the sufferers by the great fire in Pittsburg. February 21st, 1847, collection for the relief of the poor of Ireland. \$1,223 were contributed.

The collection on April 8th, 1880, for the Irish Famine Fund amounted to \$1,700.

On Sunday, September 3d, 1848, the pallium was placed by Bishop Kenrick on the Most Rev. P. R. Kenrick, Archbishop of St. Louis. Rev. Edward J. Sourin preached. On Thursday, July 23, 1846, the obsequies of Pope Gregory XVI was celebrated at this church by Pontifical Mass sung by Bishop Kenrick. Sermon by Rev. J. P. O'Dwyer, O.S.A., pastor of St. Augustine's. The text of the discourse was, "Beloved of God and of men, whose memory is in benediction." D. Desmond, the Roman Consul, the foreign Consuls and the city authorities were present.

Father Gartland continued in pastoral charge until 1850, at which time he received the appointment of Bishop of Savannah. He was *dignus* in the nomination. Thus, once again, was a pastor of St. John's elevated to the dignity and honor of a Bishop. A number of the personal friends of Father Gartland, and members of his congregation, as a tribute to his services in behalf of religion, on receiving information of the honors and responsibilities conferred upon their beloved pastor, presented him with a purse containing \$1,050.

On the transfer of Father Gartland to the Bishopric of Savannah, his Assistant, Rev. Edward J. Sourin, became pastor. On February 17th, 1851, the Catholic Philopatrian Literary Institute, at the invitation of Father Sourin, met in St. John's School-room. He had been elected the first President of the Institute on February 3d, 1851.

In 1852, the Assistants to Rev. Father Sourin were Rev. R. O'Connor and Rev. W. Kean. During this year there were 150 marriages and 305 baptisms solemnized at this church. During the early part of this year the subject of parochial schools began to be agitated in the several congregations, and about the beginning of April, arrangements were made for the reception of a large number of scholars. These were received and instructed, and by so doing for several years, a large debt was incurred. To aid in the liquidation of the debt, the Catholic Philopatrian Literary Institute secured the services of Dr. Bryant, who, in February, 1855, delivered a lecture in the church.

The efforts of Fathers Gartland and Sourin were successful in relieving the church of the debt with which it was encumbered; and on May 22d, 1853, the church was consecrated by Bishop Neumann. In the evening he lectured for the benefit of the orphans. During this year this church contributed \$5,935.75 towards the erection of the Cathedral.

On September 12th, 1854, Bishop Gartland, the former pastor of this church, died a victim to the yellow fever. He was born in Dublin in 1808, came to this country at an early age, studied at

Mt. St. Mary's College, and was ordained in 1832. The universal regret at the demise of this Prelate was no where more sincere than in St. John's parish, where Father Gartland had labored. Sad were the hearts of the people when they assembled to assist at the celebration of Pontifical Requiem Mass by Rt. Rev. Bishop Kenrick, on Wednesday, September 27th, 1854. At this time Very Rev. James Ryder, S. J., was pastor. He continued in the pastoral charge until 1857, when he was succeeded by Rev. John McGuigan, S.J., who was assisted by Rev. Father Paccharini, S.J.

In 1858 Rev. John Blox, S. J., was pastor assisted by Fathers Lachat and Ward.

In 1860, January 9th, the funeral obsequies of Rt. Rev. John Neumann, late Bishop of this diocese, took place at this church.

During the same year Rev. John Blox, the pastor, died. His Assistants in the pastoral charge at this time were Fathers Lachat and Immasso, the latter of the seculars and stationed at the church to assist the Jesuits.

In 1861 the Jesuits surrendered the control of the church, and Rev. John Brannagan, of St. Patrick's, was appointed pastor, in which position he remained but a few days, being transferred to the interior of the diocese. He was succeeded by Rev. John P. Dunn, of St. Theresa's, who continued in pastoral charge until his death, in 1869. During his pastorate he had been assisted by Rev. P. R. O'Reilley, the present Rector, Rev. Richard Keenan, Rev. Father Immasso, Rev. Peter McGrane, Rev. John Fitzmaurice, at present Rector at St. Agatha's Church, West Philadelphia, Rev. James Powers, and Rev. James Fitzmaurice, now Rector of the Church of the Sacred Heart.

On February 27th, 1861, Rt. Rev. Bishop Wood blessed the present bell. It weighs 1640 pounds.

The present Rector is Rev. P. R. O'Reilly, who has been stationed at St. John's for the past twenty years. He succeeded Rev. John P. Dunn in 1869.

The congregation are familiar with his services during this score of years, and it would be beyond the scope of this sketch to



dwell upon it words of commendation. Suffice it to say, that he is a worthy successor of the illustrious priests who have "ruled well" over the spiritual interests of those committed to his care.

It may be mentioned that, although generally believed to be free from debt, that an obligation of nearly \$25,000 rested upon the congregation. This was paid off during the pastorates of Fathers Dunn and O'Reilly. The last payment was made on November 11th, 1872.

At present the pecuniary responsibilities of the parish are only \$3,600, and this mainly for two properties on Clover St., adjoining the church property. On to-day (April 16th, 1882) the collection at the celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the opening of the church will be devoted to the payment of this debt.

Although St. John's cannot, like St. Joseph's, St. Mary's or St. Augustine's, be regarded as an "old" church, yet there are many incidents connected with its history of interest to the young of the parish, while to those of more mature years this sketch will recall pleasing memories of ceremonies at which they may have assisted, or of facts with which they may be more accurately conversant than is the writer.

With the church there are connected many joyous reminiscences and sad remembrances. It was the scene of the usefulness of Archbishop Hughes before he was called to so eminent a position among the number of the American hierarchy. Here he labored in behalf of the faith of his native land, and was successful in disseminating it not only in his own parish and diocese, but also throughout the country. Here he exerted the faculties of a vigorous mind in support of the doctrines and practices of that religion of which he was an admirable representative and so able and so eloquent a champion. Here labored the learned and sainted Bishop Kenrick, whose memory is endeared in the hearts of the people of this diocese, and by St. John's congregation in particular, with a warmth of affection entertained for but few departed Prelates. Here it was that this venerated servant of God ordained many of the clergymen who have labored earnestly and successfully for the

advancement of the faith in this diocese. What a grand theme of exultation have the faithful of this parish in the recollection that this has been the field of the labors of the two most distinguished Prelates of the Church in this country—the Most Rev. Archbishops Hughes and Kenrick—the one famed for learned and classical acquirements, the other for a vigorous and public defense of the doctrines of the Church, and a constant watchfulness in regard to its interests; thus in several cases preventing the encroachments of the State or securing the just rights of his people.

Here also labored the good Father Gartland, the memory of whose virtues is still cherished in the affectionate hearts of this congregation. He worked here for eighteen years with surpassing zeal and consummate skill, energy and success. Having thus, while a priest, labored as an apostle, it was fitting that his death should be the epitome of his life, and that his entrance to eternal life should be the result of his devotion to those principles which had ever guided him, and which should be inseparably connected with one occupying the office of a Bishop. While alleviating the miseries and affording spiritual consolation to those afflicted with the yellow fever in Savannah, in 1854, he fell a victim to the same fearful malady, thus laying down his life while laboring for his flock.

Here also labored that learned and eminent orator, Dr. Ryder—Philadelphia's King of Eloquence—than whom no other clergyman ever secured a reputation equaling that of this celebrated divine. Others may merit a distinguished position among the excellent speakers of the Catholic Church in this diocese, but none have as yet rivalled the clear, musical voice of Dr. Ryder. Of Georgetown College, the most noted of the Catholic educational establishments of this country, he had been President. In him St. John's has been most highly honored.

We would not pass by bearing testimony to the much good wrought in this parish by Rev. E. J. Sourin, now of the Society of Jesus, and at present laboring at Frederick, Md. The record of his virtues and services is impressed upon the hearts of the faith-

ful among whom he labored. And the good Fathers Blox, McGuigan, Ward and Dunn are remembered with feelings of love and respect, and are not forgotten, we trust, in the prayers for the departed pastors.

It is, perhaps, unnecessary to refer to all that the late pastor, Father Dunn, did for religion, not only in this parish, but throughout the diocese. Before coming to this city, he had been, we believe, at New Orleans. In 1839 he was stationed at St. Mary's as Assistant to Father C. J. Carter, late pastor of the Church of the Assumption. In 1840 Father Dunn began and succeeded in erecting St. Philip's Church, and of which he became the first pastor, and was such during the riots of 1844. Being transferred to Kellyville, in Delaware County, he remained there until given the pastoral charge of St. Theresa's, the pastor of which, Rev. Hugh Lane, was transferred to Kellyville. Father Dunn remained in charge of St. Theresa's until 1861, when he was transferred to St. John's, where his services are, no doubt, known to and appreciated by all. Thus, it will be observed that the scenes of his labors were many as have the duties been varied. His actions always had the sanction of the ecclesiastical authorities, and this venerable priest won the respect and esteem of the clergy as he had the confidence and affection of his people.

While we thus mention these pious, learned and zealous priests who have been intimately connected with the history of St. John's, there remains to be mentioned one who, though a layman, labored with a zeal and energy as great, perhaps, did the pastors for the welfare of the church. This benefactor of the church, and the intimate, personal friend of its founder, was M. A. Frenaye, Esq., a gentleman who devoted much wealth to the interests of this diocese, and especially for the prosperity of religion in St. John's parish. At the beginning of St. John's Church he was the most generous contributor. Of him Archbishop Hughes has written: "The position which you occupy, and have occupied since 1833, is, in my estimation, of too sacred an order to be ascribed to any human being, either as to its commencement or



as to its continuation. You have been the servant of God, and in His service you have been honored and happy. May that happiness continue until its full reward shall be realized in heaven." That he now enjoys that happiness every worshipper at St. John's will unite in hoping.

Another early benefactor of the church was the late Dr. Nancrede, who died in 1857. Of him Archbishop Hughes said: "During the period of our difficulty in the erection of St. John's Church, he stood by us with great constancy and great fidelity."

The late William Whelan was also among the number of those who rendered valuable services at the time of the commencement of the church. He became security for work to be performed—that the erection of the desired edifice might not be retarded.

St. John's parish extends from the South side of Vine to the North side of South, and from the West side of Ninth to the East side of Broad. This is a populous and wealthy district, and within it reside a number of influential Catholics, but as many who possess wealth are not the most liberal in its distribution, so to the working classes, principally, must be given the honor of contributing the means for the support of the church—as their's was the first contribution towards its beginning.

The illustrious founder of this church, in writing to his sister in November, 1832, said: "St. John's Church goes on prosperously, but its affairs leave the pastor but little time at his own disposal. This will be the case for many years, perhaps, after I am dead." Thus it is now; the church "goes on prosperously," because its present Rector and Assistants are zealously laboring for the advancement of religion—yet little time is left at their own disposal, for the spiritual interests of the people of one of our most distinguished churches require their constant attention.

The Assistants to Rev. P. R. O'Reilly are Rev. J. Ferry, Rev. J. J. Donnelly and Rev. P. Burke.

On Sunday, April 16th, 1882, the commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the opening of the church, was celebrated by Solemn Pontifical Mass being offered by Rt. Rev. Wm. O'Hara,

D. D., Bishop of Scranton, Pa. The sermon was delivered by Rt. Rev. J. R. Shanahan, Bishop of Harrisburg, Pa. In the evening Solemn Pontifical Vespers was sung by Bishop Shanahan, and the sermon was preached by Rt. Rev. Martin Crane, Bishop of the Diocese of Sandhurst, Australia.

Thus have we sketched the principal events connected with the history of St. John's Church during the past fifty years. Beginning the publication within one week of the celebration of the Semi-Centennial Anniversary, time has not permitted a more exact annalizing of the events of the past ten or fifteen years, but these are so fresh in the minds of the regular attendants at the church that the annals of the Catholic Church in this Archdiocese loses little by the omission.

That this sketch may serve to perpetuate the record of the events named, and of the servants of God who have labored for Faith and the People, I offer it to the pastor and people of St. John's in commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the opening of the church.

MARTIN I. J. GRIFFIN.





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